

Time and Death: Heidegger's Temporality in *The Magic Mountain*

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Abstract: Time, is a classical motif both in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and Heidegger's ontology. Reading *The Magic Mountain* in terms of Heidegger's ontology helps us generate a totality view of temporality in Heidegger's sense and a fresh approach to interpreting the age-old discussion in the novel. This essay attempts to offer up Heidegger's ontology on time and death as a way of revisiting the classical motif — the meaning of time that illuminated in Thomas Mann's narrative experiment, the *Zeitroman* or time novel. The novel's portrayal of death makes it possible for Hans Castorp, the protagonist of the novel, to understand 'authentic temporality' what Heidegger calls 'the meaning of the Being'. In this sense, the bewitchment of the magic mountain lies in the magic of time and death. Castorp's closeness to death enables him to understand death in the authentic way, which is in Heidegger's words, 'enter into death advance' or 'Being-towards-death' and experience a 'free and pristine' state, as Mann puts it. By extension, the experience of Castorp provides readers a perspective of apprehending Heidegger's 'Dasein' and 'authenticity'. Dasein or Castorp is not Being only to grow to well understand himself or live a new life under the influence of illness and death as many protagonists in conventional *Bildungsroman*, but Being that understands himself in terms of his Being-experiencing time's authentic temporality in authentic 'Being-a-whole' through 'Being-towards-death'.

Keywords: *Authenticity, Being-towards-death, Inauthentic Being, Temporality*

1. Introduction

Heidegger [1] once shared his reading experience of *The Magic Mountain* with Hannah Arendt in 1925: '... it is extraordinary how brilliantly that word is depicted'. But he pointed out 'it would be absurd to comb through the work' from time. Time is Heidegger's ontology's motif, also universally enshrined in *The Magic Mountain* while the rest motif of the novel is largely ignored.

In early commentaries, time in the novel is considered as a motive for the protagonist's education in psychological and moral development or *Bildung*. Hermann Weigand [2] draws a conclusion that Castorp, the protagonist of the novel, changes after he experiences timelessness atop the magic mountain. Reed [3] considers the novel as really an

educational novel, or *Bildungsroman* in German, with the character protagonist obtaining a transformation over time. Reed analyses that Castorp's *Bildung* lies in his achievement of rational synthesis at the end of the novel, rather than his escape from one time to another. The *Bildung* motif in the novel is echoed by contemporary researchers like Scaff [4] who connects time in Mann's novel to the concept of selfhood. Travers [5] [6] concludes that Castorp's *Bildung* ends in Self-discovery through the knowledge of death and sickness.

Other contemporary scholars focus on Mann's narrative of time, among them, Dorit Cohn [7] stresses the way that Mann's narrative technique achieves representation of a life lapsing into timelessness. In comparison with Vicki Baum's *Grand Hotel*, Elizabeth Boa [8] suggests that the magic mountain location acts as 'a spatial metaphor' for a

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meta-reflection on the meaning of the time shift from 19th century to modernist. While Joshua Kavaloski [9] situates time in the novel alongside Bhabha's 'performative narrative' to show how the novel connects 'objective' historical time and subjective perceived time. Erica's [10] approach to narrative temporality in the novel in the themes of space, symbols, and motifs focuses on the reader's temporal experience. These discussions are invariably organized around the strict demarcation that distinguishes the everyday time of flatland below and the 'life without time' atop the mountain in Berghof or the narration differences from conventional *Bildungsroman*. Some researchers link Mann with Nietzsche, like Picart [11] and Hartfield [12] who understand Mann's time in Nietzsche's 'eternal return of the same'.

In these researches, Heidegger's name is barely involved. However, Heidegger's 'time' and 'death' shine in the life of Castorp. It is Castorp's experience of time on the magic mountain that has a closeness to death — familiar to Castorp ever since childhood, which unties time bounded in clock and inspires Castorp to maintain himself an authentic 'Being-towards-death' and experience time's authentic temporality. Heidegger's phenomenological/ontological analysis of 'time' aims at the appearance of 'authentic Being', or one might rather say, the appearance of Being is the identity of 'primordial' time. From this respect, 'time' in the novel can be viewed as the protagonist's context that constitutes a pivotal part of the protagonist's experience or *Bildung*. Heidegger's ontological interpretation of time provides us an opportunity to integrate what scholars commonly regard as distinct motifs of the novel. The protagonist's *Bildung* and the disclosure of time's temporality in different time experiences, are actually meant to be interpreted as a single thesis all connected with the experience of death.

2. Dasein and inauthentic temporality

Heidegger refers Dasein to as both the human being and the way of Being that humans have which can be either authentic Being or inauthentic Being. Whether inauthenticity or authenticity, Dasein who lives in time and understands itself from time, can be comprehended in the figure of Hans Castorp who is questioning time and pursuing 'to pick up his life again'. Time is the condition of Dasein's totality Being, and, consequently, is always the issue for Dasein or Castorp.

Time conflict shows from the beginning of the novel when Castorp arrived. Castorp's plan to stay only three weeks is unbelievable for Joachim who is a patient there for a time. For people up the mountain, three weeks are almost nothing, but for Castorp, 'that's a long time', since he is only 'on a visit.' Time conflict looms so large afterward, not only lies

on the distinct time up and below the mountain, but the distinction between 'the length of time narrated by each chapter, and the time taken to narrate it' [13].

Compared with everyday life 'down below', time goes slowly on the mountain top. This feeling is in the sense of the ordinary conception of time measured by movement. Joachim insists they 'measure' time with 'clocks and calendars'. The ordinary conception of time, or 'clock time', is essentially physical time inherited from the Greeks. Greeks view time as a special entity and measured by movement. Aristotle [14] acknowledges time 'is not movement', but he insists 'time is a number' that can be counted in the movement. Greeks measure time by calculating natural phenomenon's movement as the sun's rising and setting, just as Joachim's assertion, 'a minute is as long as it takes a second hand to complete a circle' [15]. The unit of movement is different on the top of the mountain, Humanist Settembrini tells Castorp that they do not know the week as a unit of measurement, the smallest unit of time is the month [16]. No matter what unit of measurement, one could only perceive what exists at the present moment, which means only 'now' can be measured and conveyed, the essence of measuring activity is to calculate 'now'. Thus, time is interpreted as 'a sequence of "nows"'. Pure Physical time is in essence the now-time, as Aristotle puts it, 'if there were no time, there would be no "now", and vice versa' [17].

Now-time is infinite linear time, consisting of a passing 'now' following a coming 'now'. The sequence of 'nows' flow is uninterrupted. However 'far' the 'now' is 'divided up', it is always 'now'. Thus, the ordinary conception views time as a flowing stream consisting of 'nows' simultaneously passing away and coming along. Since every 'now' is already a 'just-now' or a 'forthwith', every last 'now' is already a 'forthwith' that is no longer, if it is limited in such character of time, then in principle, neither beginning nor end can be found in time. Time is in the sense of the 'not-yet-now' - in the sense of the 'future', hence time is endless.

In Ancient Greek, time is a special entity in which all entities are presence, in turn, the counting of 'Now-time' relies on entities in reference showed in time. Therefore, time is always occupied by things concerned with ourselves. Moments are given significance concerning human beings' involved activity. Heidegger names 'datability' (*Datierbarkeit*) as the relational structure pinning moments to events, showing the 'now', the 'then', and the 'on that former occasion' have beings dated more or less definitely. In datability, human beings arrange their activities according to time, the saying 'it's time to do...', means time is time to do something, and human adjusts their practice according to the calculation of time. Once time is not 'time

to do something' but time itself, people who are accustomed to datability would feel confused. One example of this is Joachim. On the top of the mountain, he accustoms himself everyday time and feels boring, at night he calls Castorp to sleep because 'it is time we both went to bed.' But Castorp quotes his words 'you can't call it time', because in the sanatorium there's nothing like everyday life to do. For Joachim who can't feel time go fast or slow, 'can't call it living' in Berghof.

Understanding time through referenced entities in it means interpreting time through 'letting things be as something' in Heidegger's words, which is time's inauthentic temporality or temporalizing. Along with two ways of Being (authentic Being and inauthentic Being), there are two distinct ways in which time appears: time's authentic temporalizing and inauthentic temporalizing. Latter is the ordinary conception of time measured by 'clocks and calendars' belongs to Dasein which is in inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*). 'Natural clock', as Heidegger [18] puts it, 'belongs to the Dasein which exists as thrown and falling'. Inauthentic Dasein understands itself in 'now-time' as something 'present-at-hand', which means understands itself in terms of entities showing in physical time and loses its time in it too. Heidegger uses 'they' to describe inauthentic Dasein. In inauthentic temporality, Dasein always appears like something which is the reference for measuring time and is in relation to other things or people. This related Being with other things or entities is Dasein's inauthentic Being in its everydayness, also, 'falling of Dasein'.

The 'falling' of Dasein is a basic kind of Being which belongs to everydayness, also, belongs to patients in Berghof. The mystery of Berghof lies in so few 'events' or entities associated with time atop the mountain. There are not many things to do according to the time schedule, to Castorp, the best thing up here is 'back again' in his 'comfortable chair'. That is the reason that patients feel time goes slow. New arrivals still have the 'down below' custom of the time, 'only new arrivals and short-termers measure their own private time', but as their stay longer, 'the settled citizens preferred the unmeasured' time [19]. The different feelings of time are associated with death. Since patients are dying, it is not necessary to arrange things according to time. Unlike Joachim's boredom, Castorp enjoys time atop the mountain, since he has so few related things to do, and he can have his 'leisure time' 'with no numbing activity to demolish, banish, or overwhelm it', and finds it 'to be a very suitable arrangement' [20]. To grasp Castorp's 'sense of time' which Mann calls a 'free and pristine' state [21], it is essential to understand death which constructs Castorp or Dasein's totality in Castorp's *Bildung*.

3. Death and authenticity

The character of entities is 'present-at-hand'. Dasein creates its ways of being that no other entity does. However, as its measures time through 'entities' in it, inauthentic Dasein in everydayness sees itself related to 'entities' unconsciously. In inauthentic Being, Dasein thinks, feels, and acts according to the requirement of its 'role' in everyday life rather than itself. Dasein absorbs things within time, resulting in viewing itself as a thing, a tool, as entities 'present-at-hand' in the way that the things it deals with. The typical example in the novel is Joachim who regards himself as a soldier. All things in Joachim's life aim at becoming a soldier, even health cannot hinder this aim. Time, for Joachim, is meaningless if not to be a soldier. On the flatland, Joachim performs perfectly as a soldier but is shattered by death.

The 'end' of Dasein is death. 'This end, which belongs to the potentiality-for-Being — that is to say, to existence — limits and determines in every case whatever totality is possible for Da-sein.' [22] Dasein has various possibilities to choose from, such as different professions, and social status, and could be either 'authentic Being' or 'inauthentic Being', it can avoid or pass some possibilities and fall deeply itself in everyday life, act as 'they' act. The only possibility that Dasein could never avoid or pass is death. As an 'undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns', death, for Dasein, is a final possibility that ends all possibilities.

Death is always familiar to Castorp whose awareness of death is connected with his childhood three times experiencing others' death. Looking at his dead grandfather, young Castorp has a strange feeling: 'the man lay there' 'were not Grandfather himself, but a shell', 'the face and hands of what had been his grandfather', but Grandfather was now 'only a body and nothing more' [23]. Dasein or Castorp, has always been in the anticipation of his death. Under the flash of the X-ray, Castorp 'saw exactly what he should have expected to see', he saw his death, he saw what inside the flesh 'was the delicately turned skeleton of his right hand and around the last joint of the ring finger, dangling black and loose, the signet rings his grandfather had bequeathed him...' [24]. With the help of the X-ray, death is exposed to everyone clearly as one's 'possibility of the absolute impossibility' [25].

The photographic image brings the remote possibility of death to the near. After experiencing others' death, for the first time in his life, Castorp realizes that he would die. Facing its death, Dasein has to take responsibility and take over its authentic Being. All roles one could play in one's life are invariably replaceable and alternative. No possibility in one's life is inevitable except death. One could

die for others but cannot replace others' death. 'They' as inauthentic Beings in everydayness are replaceable, but Dasein's authentic Being — Dasein's authentic Self, is irreplaceable facing death. There is no shortage of soldiers on the battlefield, but only one mortal Joachim. In this sense, death is the own-most possibility in human life, and guarantees everyone's uniqueness and the absolute value of everyone's life. Dasein's authentic Being, also Dasein's true self, along with its 'roles' in everydayness, which is Dasein's inauthentic Being, will disappear after death. All relations opened by Dasein, clear away after Dasein died. In other words, it is Dasein's authenticity, equally, Dasein's true identity that constructs Dasein's all 'roles' in everydayness, or Dasein's inauthentic Being as entities. It is Being in death, or equal to say, Being-towards-death, constructs Dasein's totality — Being-a-whole. Therefore, the ways of Being-towards-death determine Dasein's Being-a-whole.

According to two ways of Dasein's Being, there are also two ways of Being-towards-death as Being-a-whole: inauthentic and authentic ways. The inauthentic Being-towards-death is to conceal death in time's inauthentic temporality. As it is mentioned above, Dasein treats itself as entities in the ordinary conception of time, which is also time's inauthentic temporality. In the 'infinite time' consisting of flowing of 'nows', death is a remote accident, as we say 'it always has more time'. Dasein acts according to 'events' in time, similarly, Dasein considers death as a common event far from 'now' in the linear time stream. The fleeing from death and loss in the related world is a state of inauthenticity.

Though everyone acknowledges he/she will die someday, not today, not tomorrow, rather in the distant future. Then death is not worth worrying about now. Others' death is an unfortunate event — an event supposed to happen in the far future, happens now. Hence, in the ordinary conception of time, inauthentic Beings ('Others' or 'They' in Heidegger) act as what 'events' require in time: 'it is time to do...', and they conceal death as an event far away: 'there is still time to do ...'. Thus, Dasein loses itself through inauthentic Being-towards-death in time's inauthentic temporality, that is, in Heidegger's words, 'fleeing in the face of death'. Fleeing in the face of death is a looking-away from the end of Being-in-the-world, lost in 'inauthentic temporality of everyday' [26]. Dasein's lost in inauthentic temporality offers a characteristic interpretation of fleeing in the face of death, to the very end 'it always has more time'. 'Having time' means one can lose it makes itself known, as in Berghof, 'when someone dies it's kept a strict secret, out of consideration for the other patients', 'if someone dies right next door, you don't even notice it' [27].

The authentic 'Being-towards-death' is entering into death in advance. This does not mean to actualize death like Naphta's suicide in the battle with Settembrini in the novel, but to understand death as a possibility, and anticipate this possibility. Castorp, who is shown to be in the anticipation of his death, and has a spiritual need 'to take suffering and death seriously', decides to interrupt this concealment of death. He adopts the method to treat dying people with dignity and sends flowers to them, along with the disclosure of death. His desire lies 'in particular a spiritual craving to take suffering and death seriously, and pay them the respect that was their due.' [28] In Castorp's approach to the magic mountain, authenticity discloses facing death which leaves all 'duties, interests, worries, and prospects' in the everyday world down below behind. The enchantment of the magic mountain to Castorp lies in its distance to the ordinary conception of time and closeness to death through which Castorp can find and face his true identity.

Death treats everyone in the same way. And Death is the possibility-of-Being that Dasein has to take over. Standing before death, all Dasein's relations to others and to the world have been undone. Thus, being towards Dasein's own-most possibility discloses its non-relational possibility, which provides Dasein with a chance to discover its authentic Being. Unlike entities, Dasein is not related to anything but can undertake oneself as an independent Being and maintain its true self. In this attitude to death, Dasein has the possibility to 'step back' from everydayness pointing out Dasein's authentic Being. Dasein's lost is disclosed by Being-towards-death which opens Dasein's possibility of being itself face to face. Moreover, Being-towards-death brings a possibility of freedom that releases Dasein from the illusions of 'they' [29]. Only understanding Being-towards-death in authentic way allows us not 'falling' into inauthentic life which is relational to others and acts as 'roles' or 'characters' or 'they' reckoning time. Dasein, as a non-relational Being, acts on its account, to be in the horizon of death.

4. Authentic temporality and Protagonist's *Bildung*

The narrative time in *The Magic Mountain* gauged by the protagonist's feeling can be better interpreted in ontological sense. Castorp has stayed at the magic mountain for seven years, but the seven chapters of the novel are not corresponding to chronological span. The pages of the first seven months after Castorp's arrival, from chapter 1 to chapter 4, take up half of the length of the novel, while chapter 6 and chapter 7 which cover the rest of six years and five months devote the other half length. The distribution of narrative creates a perspectival approach to the hero's experience. These characteristics of the length of

the narrative lead numerous researchers to interpret the novel as a *Zeitroman*, or Time novel. The narrative technique integrates the protagonist's experience of time, the memory of death, and his growth and cultivation (*Bildung*).

Unlike the ordinary conception of time measured by a clock, authentic temporality is neither a special entity nor could be measured by movement as of 'now'. It exists as a horizon in which 'let things be'. In this horizon, Being, instead of being as something or entity, is Being itself. Time's authentic temporality 'is' not an entity at all, 'but temporalizes itself.' Heidegger names time's authentic temporality 'primordial' time in which Dasein extends its authentic Being in understanding death. Compared with the relational entities in the ordinary conception of time, a non-relational Being with primordial time enters into death in advance, bringing Dasein into a possibility of being non-relational to other things or people in everydayness. The authenticity and inauthenticity of Dasein, are both grounded ontologically on possible temporalization of temporality [30]. Dasein exists in a way as an authentic whole when 'thrown into death' [31]. Either inauthentic or authentic Being, Dasein opens temporality in Being-towards-death that is the premise of Being-a-whole, which means it is the totality of temporality temporalizing — past, future, and now arrive together, makes it possible for Dasein's Being-a-whole. Only by understanding death in an authentic way can Dasein have its authentic temporality, or, Castorp's 'free and pristine' state, as Mann puts it.

Trapped in a cabin in the snow, Castorp feels a deep experience of life facing death, which is about the relationship between authentic temporality and Being-a-whole that Heidegger would like readers to understand. Castorp makes a conclusion of all he has learned on the mountain: death, life, disease, health-spirit... all these used to be contradictions to Castorp are not problems at all, 'Death kicks over its traces...' [32] Facing death, Castorp or Dasein is non-relational Being but Being as itself, he has to 'wake up' from all dashing scenes, this does not mean life is worthless to live and leads to cynical thought, but let beings as be in its authentic temporality. Castorp realizes that he has 'known flesh and blood', who knows the body, life, and knows death as well, but this knowledge of death is 'not the whole thing' but 'merely a beginning'.

Castorp's understanding of death precisely mirrors Heidegger's conception of authentic temporality. Dasein's authentic way of relating to authentic temporality called 'anticipatory resoluteness', is also Dasein's authentic way of relating to the future, present, and the past in time's authentic temporality. Authentic temporality has a triadic structure in which past, present and future are unified: the

future is not later than 'having been', and 'having been' is not earlier than 'the present'. The arrival of authentic temporality is a primordial understanding, and its orientation shows 'headed for itself', meaning arrival to itself. Therefore, Dasein's future is never something to arrive in the ordinary conception of the future. In an ontological sense it is rather something towards which Dasein is always already headed [33]. 'Future' should not consider to start tomorrow or ten minutes later from now, nor does having been occur before today [34]. Dasein is always 'un-closed'. In this respect, what Dasein understands itself will come from Dasein's end — death, it's equal to say, Being-towards-future is Being-towards-death, and vice versa.

Whoever enters the magic mountain has closeness to death. Even if Joachim leaves Berghof and fulfills as a soldier, he is condemned to be back and died at Berghof. Frau Chauchat, whom Castorp falls in love with, shares Castorp's incubus and memory of Hippe who gave Castorp his pencil in childhood. Hippe's meaning in German: death's pruning knife, clearly shows its connection to death. Castorp's awareness of death is the distinctive possibility that Dasein has to take over. 'Letting' himself come towards himself in death, is Castorp's primordial phenomenon of 'future'. Future exists now as a possibility that Dasein holds and lives in. By anticipating death, Dasein fulfills its Being as its own so that it can come to itself, what is meant by 'future'.

Dasein's temporality extends not only to the future, but has also to the character of the past ('having been'). Authentic temporality is the totality of future, now, and past, the futural Dasein is its own-most 'as-it-already-was', that is to say, its 'having been' (past). Dasein is authentic as 'having been' only as it is in authentically future. If Dasein was not Being as its true Self, which means was not or had been not holding the possibility of death and comes future without 'having been', then Dasein cannot 'let things be', therefore, there is no present. This means the arrival of authentic temporality is not the ending of a process following the beginning of another, but openness and fusion of horizons. In this sense, life is not a process from living to death but the openness and enrichment of living [35].

Only can Castorp understand his past through the projection of a future, his understanding of 'already having-been' changes his understanding of himself. What matters about the past depends on what matters about the future. Castorp 'returns' Hippe's pencil to Frau Chauchat. Death, to Castorp, used to be intimate in his childhood, and now becomes a feeling of 'freedom'. Experience atop the magic mountain particularly the experience of time finally leads Castorp to understand death as the 'principle of genius', for the love for death 'arrives at an understanding of a humanity' [36].

Castorp's 'resolution' to 'keep faith with death' in his heart, or in Heidegger's term, being-towards-death, guides Castorp to realize his total unity by temporalizing himself, to the other way to life through death, beyond the regular way, in Castorp's words, 'the way of genius' [37].

If we interpret the novel in this ontological perspective, then, in the beginning, Castorp's 'arrival' at the magic mountain has duplicity that includes both the end of the worlds below which Castorp leaves behind and the beginning of his experience of authentic non-relational Being stripped from 'duties, interest, worries and prospects' through death. The 'arrival' to Berghof already contains the possibilities of Castorp's future, or in Heidegger's word, 'Auf-sich-zu' (back-towards-oneself), which is not in view a 'now' that has not yet become 'actual', but the arrival in which Dasein or Castorp in his own-most potentiality-for-Being, comes towards himself [38]. In this sense, Castorp's arrival is an awakening rather than 'Dasein's falling' and helps him find himself as the authentic Being-towards-death in time's authentic temporality which let Being as itself. As Heidegger reads it, Castorp's story is 'open-ended', the novel is not ended as well. Castorp's 'ending' of the journey at the magic mountain is precisely the beginning of another story or Dasein's another possibility in the war. As in time's authentic temporality, Dasein is always un-closed and possible Being.

5. Conclusion

The Magic Mountain provides a perspective of understanding time's temporalization in Heidegger: authentic temporality and inauthentic temporality. The latter is the basis of the ordinary conception of time in which time is an entity that measures itself with movement and makes things relational Beings. Disease and death atop the magic mountain enable Castorp to experience a 'free and pristine' state that is temporality's authentic temporalization, in which Dasein's existence is authentic Being-towards-death as a non-relational Being. In this ontological view, the age-old debate about time in the novel constitutes Castorp's quest for better self-knowledge, or as Mann puts it: 'one must go through the deep experience of sickness and death to arrive at a higher sanity and healthy' [39]. The issue of time, both in Mann's novel and Heidegger's ontology, is associated with Being in time, or more Heidegger, Being-towards-death. Accordingly, the essence of time in *The Magic Mountain* lies neither in the distinction between atop mountain and down below nor distinction between narrative time and story time, but in that it 'discloses' to the protagonist what death, an intimate in his childhood, really means to his life. In this sense, Heidegger reads that the time in the novel 'should not be taken into account too much', or to quote Mann's words, 'it is this notion of disease and death as a necessary route to knowledge, health,

and life that makes *The Magic Mountain* a novel of initiation' [40].

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